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Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-first session on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development

Note by the Secretary-General**

In conformity with General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, on the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-first session on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/2004/1.

** Submission of the present report was delayed in order to review comments received from users of services of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

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Annex

Triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-first session on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on an in-depth evaluation.

This triennial review concludes that the Division for Sustainable Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs has implemented or taken adequate measures towards implementing the Committee's recommendations on the evaluation of sustainable development. As a result of action taken since the evaluation done in 2001, positive changes, such as the Division's efforts to strengthen its partnerships with other United Nations agencies and to improve access to information, have already been noted. Furthermore, the results of a survey conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services illustrate that other United Nations agencies and major groups of Agenda 21 are satisfied with many of the initiatives recently undertaken by the Division.

Over the past three years, several steps have been taken to strengthen intergovernmental processes for sustainable development. The 2003 Secretary-General's follow-up report on the World Summit on Sustainable Development presents proposals for strengthening the intergovernmental review process for the implementation of Agenda 21 and defines the roles of different United Nations entities and other international institutions in sustainable development. Furthermore, steps have also been taken to strengthen inter-agency processes. In particular, the Division for Sustainable Development has worked more closely with other United Nations agencies, as exemplified by its partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme in preparing for the International Expert Meeting on the 10-year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, held in Marrakesh, Morocco, in June 2003.

Regarding reporting for sustainable development, a number of initiatives have been taken to improve the processes for obtaining and reporting information. The Division for Sustainable Development has been actively engaged over the past three years in preparing policy analyses for various aspects of sustainable development. Further, reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development has been streamlined with the issuance of more reports as background papers; the Division has also streamlined national reporting by assessing and coordinating its national reporting requirements with other United Nations agencies. Regarding access to information on sustainable development, the enhancement of the Division's web site, its quarterly Commission on Sustainable Development newsletters, and its ongoing partnership with the Department of Public Information have all served to increase access by both government representatives and the public.

The Division for Sustainable Development has actively sought to improve the quality of information on sustainable development by incorporating perspectives from regions, major groups of Agenda 21, and other relevant sources. Specifically, the Division was more proactively engaged with the regional commissions while preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and continues to work with them in its preparations for the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to be held in 2004. The Division for Sustainable Development also maintains regular contact with and obtains feedback from major groups. Lastly, the Division is making greater use of more diversified sources of information from other United Nations agencies, such as the World Health Organization, as well as from the scientific and business communities.

The Division has also successfully provided support to sustainable development at the country level. Through its regional and global meetings, it has facilitated the exchange of national experiences and it has developed and shared guidelines for national sustainable development strategies. Further, the Division provides technical assistance and advisory services to developing countries and countries with economies in transition on a demand-driven basis, identifying needs, formulating and executing projects and through responding to critical situations.

While positive impact has been noted with the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, several issues continue to require attention. These include the continuing dissemination of the concept of sustainable development (incorporating its three social, economic and environmental pillars and its emphasis on integration), continued efforts to streamline national reporting, further facilitation and support of national Governments' monitoring of their sustainable development strategies and strengthening of the Division's technical cooperation programme.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-first session, in 2001, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of sustainable development (E/AC.51/2001/2). The Committee endorsed all ten recommendations contained in the evaluation report.[1]

2. The present report contains the findings of the triennial review conducted to determine the extent to which the Committee's recommendations made three years ago have been implemented. The status of the ten recommendations is discussed in section II below, under the following four headings: (a) intergovernmental processes for sustainable development; (b) information and reporting on sustainable development; (c) inter-agency coordination on sustainable development; and (d) support to sustainable development programmes. The present report also reflects new developments in sustainable development as they pertain to the implementation and outcomes of the recommendations. No new issues were identified during the review.

3. The subprogramme on sustainable development, established in 1992 after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, is implemented by the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Division provides coordinated support for the implementation of Agenda 21,[2] the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21[3] and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation,[4] as well as the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[5] and other outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including the work programmes and decisions adopted by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

4. This triennial review is based on the following four methods: (a) the information provided by the Division for Sustainable Development on progress made in implementing the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, a process which is monitored twice a year by the Office of Internal Oversight Services; (b) a review in early 2004 of the relevant documents obtained from the Division; (c) consultations in early 2004 with staff of the Division; and (d) a survey done in late 2003 of 19 respondents from different United Nations agencies and major groups of Agenda 21 concerned with sustainable development. A draft of the report was made available to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for review. Their comments are identified in the present report by the use of italics.

II. Findings

A. Intergovernmental processes for sustainable development

Recommendation 1
Facilitating intergovernmental processes

In collaboration with the members of the organizations of the Administrative Committee for Coordination, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should identify intergovernmental processes at the global and regional levels where

insufficient attention has been given to the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. As a result of this initiative, the Division for Sustainable Development should, by the end of 2002, present proposals to the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development to organize focused consultations between Government representatives engaged in other intergovernmental processes and members of the Commission and its Bureau.

5. Several conferences and initiatives over the past three years have contributed to the enhancement of intergovernmental processes. Most significantly, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August and September 2002, resulted in new partnership initiatives by and between Governments, civil society and business. Further, the Plan of Implementation of the Summit addresses intergovernmental processes where insufficient attention has been given to sustainable development by specifically delineating the respective roles of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Sustainable Development and other international and regional institutions. The Plan specifically states that the Commission should be the high-level commission on sustainable development within the United Nations system and should promote and facilitate partnerships involving Governments, international organizations and relevant stakeholders.

6. The report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the future role of the Commission on Sustainable Development: the implementation track,[6] which was prepared for the eleventh session of the Commission, presents proposals for strengthening the intergovernmental review process. In particular, in the report, it is stressed that the future programme of the Commission should consider the need to complement and not duplicate the work of other intergovernmental forums. The report also discusses the greater integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and the strengthening of the institutional framework for sustainable development.

7. The Commission concluded its eleventh session in May 2003 with an agreement on its future programme and organization of work up to the year 2017. The Commission now functions on a two-year cycle that includes review years and policy years. The review year evaluates progress made in implementing sustainable development goals, as well as identifying obstacles and constraints; it begins with regional implementation meetings that will contribute to the review session of the cycle. The Commission's work during the review session will be supported by the Secretary-General's state of implementation reports. The policy year decides on concrete measures to facilitate implementation; it will be preceded by an intergovernmental preparatory meeting in February or March (two months prior to the session of the Commission) to discuss policy options and possible actions to address the constraints and obstacles in the process of implementation identified during the review year.

8. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 1 was implemented.

B. Information and reporting on sustainable development

Recommendation 2
Enhancing the understanding of sustainable development

(a) Policy summaries. The Division for Sustainable Development should, based on the work done in different parts of the United Nations system, prepare by the end of 2001, summaries of the main policy aspects of poverty, and consumption and production patterns — the two overriding issues of sustainable development identified in the programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development for the period 1998-2002 — as they relate to the different chapters of Agenda 21. These summaries should serve as the basis for discussions, initiated in the course of 2002, with secretariat units in other sectors of the United Nations, to integrate better the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. In the future, additional summaries should be prepared for such other issues as health and gender, as needed.

(b) Key characteristics of sustainable development programmes. The organizations members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development should articulate, by the end of 2002, a set of key characteristics of sustainable development programmes that would promote a common understanding of the concept of sustainable development and its implications for policy decisions. Based on analysis of country experiences in implementing sustainable development programmes, the set of key characteristics should be formulated in terms that facilitate adaptation to country-specific conditions.

9. The Division for Sustainable Development has been actively engaged over the past three years in preparing policy analyses for various aspects of sustainable development. As part of the preparatory processes for the World Summit, the Division prepared policy reports on combating poverty and on changing consumption patterns in March 2001. The reports discuss trends, current issues and challenges for the future. In the assessment of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, these papers present a balanced appraisal of the main policy aspects of poverty and consumption and production patterns and how these issues fit into the wider context of sustainable development. However, they do not contain an identification of the roles that should be played by United Nations agencies to better implement Agenda 21. Further, as part of the follow-up to the Summit, the Division prepared a survey of international activities on consumption and production patterns.

10. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that the Division continues to work consistently with other United Nations agencies to ensure that all issues of sustainable development are covered. A recent example of this was the International Expert Meeting on the 10-year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, held in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 16 to 19 June 2003, which was organized by the Division in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Over 100 participants from approximately 70 countries attended the meeting to develop a ten-year framework of programmes for sustainable development and production. Participants in the meeting included representatives from government agencies, international organizations, industry groups, non-governmental organizations and academia.

11. Although the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development was abolished by the former Administrative Committee on Coordination (now the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination) in 2000, progress has been made over the past three years in developing agreed-upon key characteristics of national sustainable development strategies. The International Forum on National Sustainable Development Strategies, held in Accra, from 7 to 9 November 2001, examined, among other things, national experiences in developing national sustainable development strategies. Following that conference, the Division for Sustainable Development issued two volumes that summarized the meeting and provided guidance on how to prepare a national sustainable development strategy.

12. Despite the efforts discussed above, however, the results of the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey indicate that there is still no common understanding of the concept of "sustainable development" among governing and policy-making bodies. A majority of respondents (15 out of 19) did not believe that such a common understanding currently exists. While many of these respondents stated that there was greater awareness of the concept of sustainable development, some said it was still widely regarded as an environmental issue. *The Department stated that this misperception was likely due to an inadequate understanding of the three [social, economic and environmental] pillars of sustainable development. To speed up progress in sustainable development, the General Assembly, by its resolution 57/253 of 20 December 2002, decided to adopt sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, in particular for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.* In resolution 57/253, the General Assembly reaffirmed the need to ensure a balance between economic development, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development.

13. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that the Division has made meaningful efforts to implement recommendation 2. However, more attention should be given to achieving a more common understanding of sustainable development and to further discussion of the roles played by United Nations agencies to better implement Agenda 21.

Recommendation 3
Streamlining reporting

(a) Reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development. Under guidance of the Commission on Sustainable Development and its Bureau, the Division for Sustainable Development should enter into consultation with the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, so that the reports issued before the sessions of the Commission focus on key elements to be addressed at the upcoming session. Other required information, of general or technical nature, should be issued at regular intervals during the intersessional period.

(b) National reporting.

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development should ask the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and the regional commissions to identify existing national reporting and data-collection

activities that would provide the non-restricted information required by the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(ii) The Division should review the potential of the common country assessment to support the reporting needs of the Commission for national information and make proposals for consideration by the Commission before the end of its tenth session, in 2002;

(iii) Under the guidance of the Commission and its Bureau, the Division should limit its requests for national information to information not readily available elsewhere in the United Nations system.

14. As the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Division solicits, collects and analyses national reports that are relevant to the work programme of the Commission. In this capacity, the Division has undertaken several initiatives to streamline requests for national reporting. For example, in February 2002, it organized a meeting of national focal points to discuss proposals for improving and facilitating national reporting. The results of the meeting were made available at the World Summit. With regard to preparations for the Summit, members of the former Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development agreed to issue reports on key issues to be discussed at the Summit as background papers during the four sessions of the Commission functioning as the Preparatory Committee for the Summit. In total, 31 documents were issued as background papers for the second, third and fourth Summit Preparatory Committee meetings.

15. After the abolishment of the Inter-Agency Committee, the Division continued to ensure inter-agency coordination. For example, it conducted an analysis of United Nations national reporting requests to determine where both overlapping and gaps for information exist, which included an examination of the common country assessment in the context of the reporting needs of the Commission. The results of the analysis were presented at the eleventh session of the Commission, in May 2003, and are summarized in a matrix in the Division's background paper No. 3, entitled "Note by the secretariat on national reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development".[7] In the paper, it is specifically stated that a number of national Governments have indicated that the availability of such a matrix could facilitate their preparation of national information strategies to address the challenge of preparing and consolidating inputs from inside as well as outside their government administrations for reporting to the United Nations system. In the assessment of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the matrix provides a comprehensive and useful framework for outlining current United Nations national reporting requests. It analyses specific reporting requests by, among other variables, publication, issues covered, lead organization, national focal point, periodicity and methodology.

16. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that the Division continued to make a concerted effort to ask only for national reporting on data that was not readily available elsewhere in the United Nations system. The Division is working with national focal points and other partners to develop formalized procedures and mechanisms to enhance harmonization and avoid duplications. However, this approach must ensure that the Commission obtains all of the information and data it requires. The above-mentioned background paper specifically stresses the need for consistent coordinated monitoring and reporting of national and regional level information related to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Agenda 21 and other

relevant conference outcomes. Further, in a recent note on preparations for the twelfth session of the Commission, the Division noted that, with a view to trying to reduce the reporting burden on countries, the secretariat of the Commission had been undertaking action on several fronts. No new surveys or information requests had been specifically generated for the process of preparing for the Commission's twelfth session, but rather, countries had been asked to provide updates for their national reports for the session based on existing information.

17. The initiatives discussed above appear to have had a positive impact on streamlining reporting. Nevertheless, the results of the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey indicate that more work may be needed to further streamline reporting. Nearly half of the survey's respondents (9 out of 19 respondents) did not believe that the work of national Governments to prepare national reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development had been streamlined. Most of the respondents said that greater coordination was needed between different ministries at the national level; some respondents believed that the Division should develop more concise indicators, along with increased guidance on how to use them for national reporting. Further, while 9 out of 19 respondents believed that about the right number of documents was submitted to the Commission, 6 out of 19 said that too many documents were still being submitted.

18. While the Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 3 has been implemented, the Division for Sustainable Development should be encouraged to continue its efforts to streamline national reporting.

Recommendation 4
Quality of information

(a) Regional perspectives

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development should ensure that the reports prepared for the Commission on Sustainable Development or other related intergovernmental processes integrate different regional perspectives through a process of consultations with the regional offices of United Nations organizations, the regional commissions and relevant regional and subregional organizations. Consultations should be initiated at the planning stage of reporting, giving adequate attention to the critical and unresolved issues that require additional study at the regional level;

(ii) The Division should review the capacity of regional and subregional organizations to participate in the work envisaged in subparagraph (i) above and bring to the attention of relevant bodies problems that may exist where capacity is insufficient.

(b) Diversified sources of information. The Division for Sustainable Development should ensure that the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development who are consolidating information for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development are in a position to use diversified sources of information, geographically and by sectors of activity, including contributions of the scientific community, social groups and business and industry groups, as recommended by the General Assembly in paragraph 133 (e) of the annex to its resolution S-19/2 of 28 June 1997;

(c) Calendar. For the preparation of reports, the Division for Sustainable Development should propose a calendar that provides sufficient lead time for adequate consultations at each stage of the process.

19. The Division has worked towards improving the quality of information on sustainable development by increasingly incorporating regional perspectives. First, in cooperation with the regional commissions and UNEP, the Division organized regional and subregional meetings and round tables between August and November 2001, as part of preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the three regional reports on Agenda 21 produced by the Division from 1998 to 2000 were used at the Summit. The Division is also continuing to work with the regional commissions as it prepares for the twelfth session of the Commission, to be held in April of 2004. In particular, a series of regional implementation meetings were held between October 2003 and January 2004. The format of the review session of the Commission will include regional sessions for each of the United Nations regions. In particular, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was told that the regional reports issued by the regional commissions presenting perspectives from the different regions had been very valuable. Further, the Division prepares forecasts of all documentation needed for the Commission. For example, in its preparation for the twelfth session of the Commission, the Division's internal deadline for completion of the Secretary-General's reports was the end of December 2003.

20. In the past three years, the Division has also made a strong effort to incorporate more diversified sources of information in preparing its papers and reports. It broadened its data sources by incorporating information from other United Nations agencies, the scientific and business communities and non-government organizations. In particular, it is attempting to make full use of information from within the United Nations system by utilizing reports prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Staff of the Division are also making greater use of information from universities, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and professional journals.

21. This greater use of more diversified sources of data must be seen within the wider context of bringing a more analytical perspective into the work of the Division. In particular, the Division's Policy Integration and Analysis Branch fosters more cross-branch collaboration by providing analytical inputs into the work of the entire Division. It looks at trends and analyses their underlying causes and identifies emerging issues and flags them for the attention of Member States.

22. The positive results of the Division's efforts to enhance the quality of information on sustainable development can be seen in the responses received to the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey. First, 15 out of 19 respondents stated that regional involvement in sustainable development efforts had increased over the past three years. In addition, 17 out of 19 respondents said that, overall, documents submitted by the Secretariat offered a balanced presentation of different perspectives. Further, 12 of the 19 respondents rated the overall quality of the documents as "good".

23. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 4 was implemented.

Recommendation 5
Facilitating access to information

(a) Access by government representatives. To facilitate government representatives' continuous access to information, the Division for Sustainable Development should take the following initiatives:

(i) Notify government representatives of the Division's contact persons for the different items on the agenda of the Commission on Sustainable Development by the end of 2001;

(ii) Provide a summary of each report in accordance with the six-week rule and organize Secretariat briefings on key reports, highlighting policy implications of analyses presented and clarifying technical concepts in the course of 2002;

(iii) Facilitate access to information on new developments and informal exchange of information through the means of an electronic message facility for use by government representatives by the end of 2002.

(b) Access by the general public

(i) The Division for Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information should meet on a quarterly basis to identify new developments and upcoming events of interest to the media, not necessarily linked to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and decide on what information material should be prepared to better promote sustainable development. Such consultations should be held in the context of the information strategy of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

(ii) The Division should facilitate access by regional networks of major group organizations to information on sustainable development, which they could use for wider dissemination to their constituencies.

24. In response to the question of what steps the Division had taken to ensure that both government representatives and the general public had access to information on sustainable development, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that the development and enhancement of the Division's current web site after the World Summit on Sustainable Development had been the most significant step taken. The Office of Internal Oversight Services conducted a review of the Division's web site and found it to be comprehensive, easy to navigate, current and useful. In fact, many of the documents used in conducting the present triennial review were easily obtained from the web site. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also noted evidence that the web site is regularly updated, when a summary of a January 2004 meeting of the Bureau of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development was posted just days after the meeting had occurred. The results of the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey support this assessment. Three fourths of all respondents (14 out of 19) rated the web site as "very good" or "good" with regard to ease of extracting information. In addition, the majority of respondents (13 out of 19) said that the web site currently met their needs for online services.

25. The quarterly *CSD Update* online newsletters provide an additional means of providing information to Governments and the general public. This online update is distributed four to five times a year, with the latest having been issued in November

2003. The Division for Sustainable Development also adheres to the six-week rule for providing summaries of reports prior to meetings of the Commission, as evidenced by the recent note from the Division on the forthcoming twelfth session to the effect that official reports would be issued at least six weeks before the review session of the Commission.

26. Further, the Division maintains regular contact and partnerships with the Department of Public Information and one of its staff members is assigned as the focal point with the Department. Specific examples of collaboration between the Division and the Department of Public Information include working together on the brochure "Partnerships for Sustainable Development"[8] which was completed in August 2003. The Department of Public Information is also working with the Division to set up exhibits and videoconferencing for the twelfth session of the Commission.

27. In addition, the Division maintains regular contact with and takes the initiative to obtain feedback from major groups, with which it holds monthly teleconferences. A post has been approved for the Division's work on partnerships. The Division has created a "major groups" page on its web site and also plans to organize a partnership fair as part of the review session of the Commission. It is noteworthy that 11 out of 19 respondents to the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey believed that the Division sufficiently involved major groups concerned with sustainable development.

28. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 5 was implemented. In particular, the enhancement of the web site of the Division for Sustainable Development must be seen as a significant accomplishment.

C. Inter-agency coordination on sustainable development

Recommendation 6
Inter-agency coordination

(a) Reformulating terms of reference. To enhance the benefits of a coordinated implementation of Agenda 21 and related commitments, the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development should review the terms of reference of the task manager function and of the secretariat of the Committee. As a result of the review, the Committee — or any successor coordination mechanism established in accordance with paragraph 38.16 of Agenda 21 — should identify:

(i) The concrete actions expected from task managers, inter alia, to maintain interactions among organizations, submit timely reporting to the Division for Sustainable Development and report on difficulties in programme implementation that may require the Division's attention;

(ii) The concrete actions expected from its secretariat, the Division, inter alia, to monitor the effectiveness of coordination arrangements, to bring to the attention of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development new issues and to represent the Committee's concerns in other inter-agency mechanisms;

(iii) Other organizations and divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs that would assume a number of task manager responsibilities presently assigned to the Division, to enable the Division to focus on its secretariat function.

(b) Secondment of experts to the Division for Sustainable Development:

(i) During the time when the Commission on Sustainable Development is focusing its work on one main topic, which requires in-depth and current knowledge of developments in the field, the Division for Sustainable Development should obtain the secondment of relevant expert personnel from United Nations organizations to coordinate the preparation of reports submitted to the Commission, to carry out liaison with the secretariats of other intergovernmental processes and to assist the Commission, its intersessional groups and Bureau, at their request, with briefings, substantive advice and notes;

(ii) When the cost of such secondments cannot be covered from contributing organizations or the Division's existing resources, the Division should seek additional voluntary contributions from donor Governments.

29. Although the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its task manager system have been abolished, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that the Division continued informally to rely on such a system when preparing the reports of the Secretary-General. The Division also relied on a list of agency focal points in order to coordinate its efforts with other United Nations agencies. Specific examples of collaboration include the meeting held in Marrakesh in June 2003, which the Division organized together with UNEP (see para. 10 above), and the Division's work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in conducting workshops and implementing projects on sustainable development capacity-building at the country level.

30. The Division has not significantly used secondment of United Nations experts over the past three years. *The Department stated that it worked closely with experts in specialized agencies.* In 2001, two consultants were funded by a grant from the World Bank under a project entitled "Global Initiatives on Transport Emissions". The Division had a secondment from the Global Environment Facility secretariat, as part of its preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and has also used secondments from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and UNEP.

31. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 6 was implemented.

D. Support to sustainable development programmes

Recommendation 7
Support to national sustainable development programmes

(a) Exchange of national experience. Regarding the exchange of experience on national sustainable development strategies and programmes, the Division for Sustainable Development should, in particular:

(i) Promote the exchange of experience as a regular agenda item of regional and subregional organizations;

(ii) Support regional and subregional assessments of the implementation of sustainable development goals, in collaboration with the regional commissions and other members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development;

(iii) Provide to national officials reporting on national implementation of Agenda 21 the information needed to reach other national contact points working on similar issues.

(b) Use of national sustainable development strategies. Drawing from experience at the national level and in collaboration with UNDP, the Division for Sustainable Development should monitor progress made in the use of national sustainable development strategies through the common country assessment process and the work of the United Nations Development Group.

32. The Division for Sustainable Development, through its regional and global meetings, facilitates the exchange of national experiences. The Plan of Implementation adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development stated that both the implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the Summit should be accomplished at the regional and subregional levels through the regional commissions and other bodies. As a most recent example, regional input for the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development was obtained through a series of regional implementation meetings held at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Europe.

33. As previously discussed (see para. 11 above), the International Forum on National Sustainable Development Strategies, which was convened in Accra, in November 2001, identified a list of key characteristics that are vital to a solid national sustainable development strategy. Based on recommendations made at that meeting, the Division prepared background paper No. 13, entitled "Guidance in preparing a national sustainable development strategy: managing sustainable development in the new millennium",[9] which was submitted at the second meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The paper presented five underlying elements to effective strategies: (a) country ownership and strong political commitment; (b) integrated economic, social and environmental objectives across sectors, territories and generations; (c) broad participation and effective partnerships; (d) development of capacity and enabling environment; and (e) focus on outcomes and means of implementation. Further, as previously discussed (see para. 29), the Division works with UNDP in conducting workshops and implementing projects on sustainable development at the country level, which includes the use of the common country assessment process.

34. Nevertheless, the results of the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey identify vulnerabilities in the use of indicators to monitor the development and implementation of national sustainable development strategies. Most respondents (14 out of 19) did not believe that the sustainable development indicators and objectives adopted by the Commission on Sustainable Development were being used as tools by national Governments to assess their own progress on sustainable

development. Further, 16 out of 19 respondents said that national Governments were not conducting sufficient monitoring of their own national strategies.

35. While the Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the Division has taken steps to implement recommendation 7, it should strengthen its support to national Governments by considering ways in which to further facilitate and support their monitoring of their own sustainable development strategies. It is recognized that the effectiveness of such efforts will need to be considered within the context of broad alliances of intergovernmental organizations providing support to national Governments on their sustainable development strategies.

Recommendation 8
Technical assistance provided by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

(a) Promoting capacity. As part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs review of its programme of technical assistance to promote better its capacity to assist, the Division for Sustainable Development should:

(i) Identify areas where other organizations carry out similar activities with similar institutional advantages, such as the regional commissions, and maintain regular interactions with those organizations to develop a coordinated programme of assistance;

(ii) Identify areas of technical assistance where it can carry out activities that are unique.

(b) Critical situations. In the areas of natural resources management where the Division for Sustainable Development is mandated to provide technical assistance and to take into account the results of the review referred to in subparagraph (a) above, in order to ensure that critical situations are not left without adequate response, the Division should:

(i) Promote multisectoral approaches, good practices and knowledge-sharing for practical application in national and local contexts, testing and evaluation.

36. According to its web site, the Division provides targeted parliamentary, analytical and technical advisory services at the request of individual Governments and that special expertise is available in freshwater management, energy, infrastructure and land management and mineral resources. Expertise is also available on financial issues related to economic development, social development and environmental protection. The web site identifies 16 different advisers and regular staff with expertise in a wide range of sectors, including energy, natural resources and water.

37. The Water, Natural Resources and Small Island Developing States Branch of the Division received requests for technical assistance and advisory services from several countries in 2003, including Nicaragua, the Niger, Tajikistan, Yemen and several small island developing States. In that same year, the Energy and Transport Branch received requests for technical assistance and advisory services from 16 countries, among them Cameroon, China, Ecuador and India. According to staff, these requests are handled on a "case-by-case basis", depending on the staffing and resources available. The Division attempts to comply with all the demands, including by using external expertise. The Division's technical assistance

programme is also designed to address critical situations when they emerge, by sending a mission to assess immediate damage and/or by helping Governments to recover from the crises. One recent example of the Division offering its assistance was with arsenic poisoning of the water supply in Bangladesh. Staff at the Division also stated that another important component of its technical assistance programme was its role as a link between intergovernmental processes and the situation at the national level.

38. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was informed that a multisectoral approach was increasingly being taken in the technical assistance programme of the Division. For example, the water and energy sections are working jointly on a technical assistance project in the Gambia. Staff of the Division stated that such a multisectoral approach improved project delivery and efficient use of resources and made it easier to obtain project funding from external sources. This broadening approach also incorporates non-governmental organizations and the private sector. For example, in 2001, both non-governmental organizations and the private sector were asked to submit "success stories" for sustainable development strategies on energy, transportation and atmosphere. These were distributed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Further, the Division identifies areas where other organizations carry out similar technical assistance activities. For example, the Division is the secretariat for "UN Water", which is a group comprising over 20 different United Nations agencies concerned with water issues. Finally, the Division is making an effort to utilize additional funding sources for its technical assistance programme, such as the Development Account and the Japanese Human Security Trust Fund.

39. Virtually all respondents to the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey stated that both the amount and the quality of technical assistance for Agenda 21 (10 out of 12 respondents who offered an opinion) and for the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (8 out of 8 respondents who offered an opinion) had either increased or stayed the same over the past three years. Some respondents, however, stated that not all of their needs for technical assistance were being met.

40. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that, while there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 8 was implemented, the Division should consider ways and means by which to strengthen its technical assistance programme.

Recommendation 9
Funding of sustainable development programmes

On a biennial basis, the Division for Sustainable Development should organize an exchange of experience among members of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development on funding sustainable development programmes, through, inter alia, reviewing experience with specialized small-sized funds, access to global funds or mainstreaming sustainable development activities in broader financing for development arrangements.

41. The Inter-Agency Committee has been abolished and is therefore no longer a mechanism for coordination. However, the Office of Internal Oversight Services considers that other forums have addressed the issue of funding sustainable development programmes. In March 2002, the International Conference on Financing for Development[10] addressed the challenges of financing for development

around the world, particularly in developing countries. In particular, the Conference discussed ways in which to mobilize and increase the effective use of financial resources and international trade for sustainable development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development also included financing for sustainable development in its agenda. During the Summit, more than 220 partnerships, representing $235 million in resources, were identified to complement government commitments.

42. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes there is sufficient evidence to conclude that recommendation 9 was implemented.

Recommendation 10
Action by the Commission on Sustainable Development

The present report, together with the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination thereon, should be submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its tenth session for review and action.

43. The Office of Internal Oversight Services in-depth evaluation of sustainable development was provided as background material to the Commission at its tenth session, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Office of Internal Oversight Services therefore considers that recommendation 10 was implemented.

III. Conclusion

44. **Over the past three years, progress has been made towards promoting and strengthening the sustainable development agenda. The 2003 report of the Secretary-General on the World Summit on Sustainable Development[11] presents proposals for strengthening the intergovernmental review process for Agenda 21 and defines the role of different United Nations entities and other international institutions in sustainable development. The Division for Sustainable Development has also successfully partnered with other United Nations agencies in the sustainable development arena.**

45. **Further, the enhancement of the Division's web site, its quarterly Commission on Sustainable Development newsletters, and its ongoing partnership with the Department of Public Information have all served to increase access to information by both government representatives and the public. The Division has also improved the quality of that information by increasingly incorporating regional and major group perspectives and by relying on diversified sources of information from other United Nations agencies and the scientific and business communities.**

46. **Through its regional and global meetings, the Division has facilitated the exchange of national experiences and has provided guidance for national sustainable development strategies. Further, it provides technical assistance to countries by executing projects, sending advisers, identifying external experts, responding to critical situations and acting as a link between intergovernmental processes and the situation at the national level.**

47. **Greater efforts should be made to address a number of issues that warrant continued attention. These include the continuing dissemination of the concept of sustainable development (incorporating its social, economic and**

environmental pillars and its emphasis on integration), continued efforts to streamline national reporting, further facilitation and support of national Governments' monitoring of their own sustainable development strategies and strengthening of the technical cooperation programme of the Division for Sustainable Development.

48. **The sustainable development environment is a dynamic one with changing priorities and agendas. In fact, 14 out of 19 respondents to the Office of Internal Oversight Services survey stated that national Governments were faced with too many different strategic priorities when implementing their national sustainable development strategies. In addition, 6 out of 19 respondents volunteered that there was still a need for greater inter-agency coordination and mainstreaming of sustainable development activities. It is the opinion of the Office of Internal Oversight Services that the Division for Sustainable Development can continue to play an important role in coordinating and harmonizing the future agenda for sustainable development.**

49. **The Office of Internal Oversight Services therefore considers that the Division for Sustainable Development, as the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development and with its experience and expertise, is well positioned to play a significant role in furthering the goals of sustainable development in the future. The World Summit on Sustainable Development largely established the future work plan for the Division. Its leadership has identified both challenges and opportunities and has developed a strong agenda to correspond with the priorities of sustainable development over the next 15 years. The Division for Sustainable Development should continue its efforts to reach out to and work with other United Nations agencies, the regional commissions, major groups of Agenda 21 and the business community.**

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/56/16), paras. 366-368.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I: *Resolutions adopted by the Conference*, resolution 1, annex II.

[3] Resolution S-19/2, annex.

[4] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1 and corrigendum), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[5] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[6] E/CN.17/2003/2, para. 25 (d).

[7] E/CN.17/2003/BP.3.

[8] DPI/2323.

[9] E/CN.17/2002/BP.13.

[10] *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[11] A/58/210.